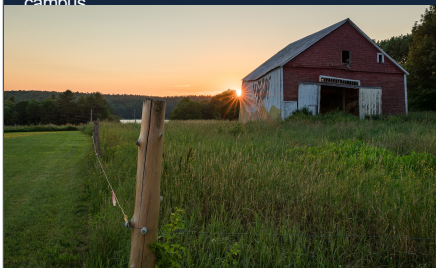


So, You Want to Farm in Maine? Using BrightSpace

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Abstract

The *So, You Want to Farm in Maine (SYWTFIM)* short-course has been offered as a workshop series through UMaine Extension for many years. Usually offered regionally and in-person, this is now the third year it was available online only using BrightSpace and synchronous Zoom sessions SYWTFIM is designed to introduce farm business management topics such as enterprise budgeting, cash flow projections, recordkeeping, business planning, insurance, taxes, and regulations to those who are starting farms in Maine. Each class is designed to be interactive and features many guest speakers, including agriculture service providers from an array of sectors and those who are currently farming successfully. The 2022 series offered a different approach as participants included 44 aspiring farmers as well as 13 UMaine undergraduates, providing the opportunity for richer discussions and connections between those interested in starting Maine farms imminently, as well as students, with a variety of backgrounds and experience. The undergraduates were teamed with aspiring farmers to create draft business plans and enterprise budgets over the course of five weeks. Income from those plans totaled over \$2 million. All participants had the opportunity to receive USDA Farm Service Agency borrower training credit, with 25 participants receiving this credit. Also, undergraduates receive one course credit for successful completion. This model is new to UMaine and is seen as an innovative way to create deeper connections between Cooperative Extension and the School of Food and Agriculture as undergraduates do not always know what Cooperative is and does, and the aspiring farmers may not have any previous connection to campus.



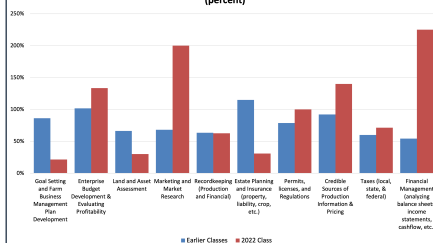
Objectives:

Equip current farmers and those who want to farm with knowledge and skills to start, adapt and maintain a profitable land-based business. Participants will:

- Feel more confident starting a farm-based business
- Develop a business plan
- Learn how Cooperative Extension and other agencies can assist them
- Learn how to market their products



Chart 1: Change in Ranking of Understanding of Topics (percent)



Methods:

- Ten sessions (2 per week for five weeks)
 - Lectures & Videos,
 - Farmer/student teams,
 - Weekly assignments
- One on one farm plan review
- Course text & website
- Speakers
 - Extension staff,
 - Ag Service Providers,
 - Farmers
- Meeting modes:
 - BrightSpace Platform,
 - Live by Zoom,
 - Archived recordings



Chart 2: Change in Confidence on Ability to Develop a Viable Farm Business (percent)

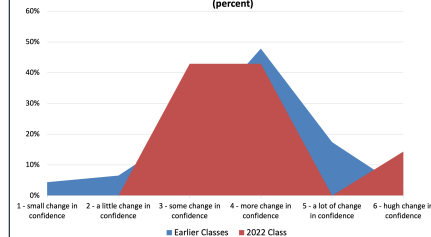
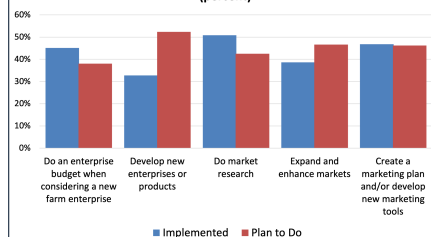
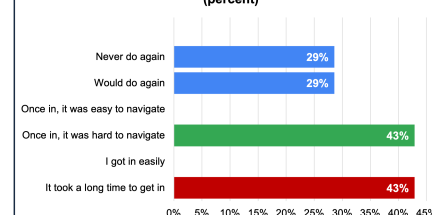


Chart 3: Top Five Practices Implemented or Planned As A Result of Attending the Program (percent)



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Chart 4: 2022 Experience with BrightSpace Platform (percent)



Impacts

The level of engagement and commitment to attend the classes and complete the homework was by far the greatest with the 2022 class with 58% of farmers and 85% of undergrads attending at least 80% of the classes or viewing the recorded sessions compared to 48% of farmers attending in 2021.

In 2022 there were sixteen farmers who participated in the one-on-one sessions estimated a total of almost one million dollars in farm income from one or more enterprises at full production. Students farm plans submitted for credit estimated almost one million dollars in farm income.

Twenty-two farmers and students received FSA Borrower Training Certificates.

In 2022 44% of participants received FSA Borrower Training Certification compared to 22% in 2021. In previous years the Farm Service Agency provided \$2.7 million in farm direct loans because of Maine farmers attending this approved borrower training program.